

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 FEAE-00 /069 W

----- 050950

R 231200Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9750

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, TD

SUBJ: THE 1976 GENERAL ELECTION

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 2409, PORT OF SPAIN 2348

1. ON SEPTEMBER 13, THE PEOPLE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WENT TO THE POLLS AND GAVE A SOLID MANDATE TO THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT (PNM) AND ITS POLITICAL LEADER, DR ERIC WILLIAMS, FOR A CONTINUATION OF THEIR 20-YEAR RULE. WITH TWO THIRDS OF THE 36 SEATS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND A MAJORITY OF THE SEATS IN THE APPOINTIVE SENATE, PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS WILL HAVE A COMFORTABLE WORKING MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. HE WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE TO FRUITION THE AMBITIOUS INFRASTRUCTURE AND HEAVY INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PLANS WHICH THE PNM GOVERNMENT DEVELOPED AND BEGAN IMPLEMENTING AFTER THE POST-1973 OIL BONANZA. THE PNM VICTORY SHOULD ENSURE THAT TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO REMAINS

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A PLURALISTIC DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY WITH A STRONG

RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN AND LEGAL RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS
AND WITH A PRAGMATIC, NON-IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE
ORGANIZATION OF ITS MIXED ECONOMY.

2. THE ELECTION TENDED TO CONFIRM THE VIEW THAT THE MAJORITY
OF TRINIDAD'S VOTERS ARE BASICALLY CONTENT WITH THE
STABILITY AND PROGRESS WHICH THEY HAVE ACHIEVED UNDER
THE 20 YEARS OF PNM RULE AND WERE UNWILLING TO
JEOPARDISE THAT STABILITY BY ASKING FOR A NEW AND UN-
TESTED POLITICAL PARTY. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY -
CABINET MEMBERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES - WHO
STOOD FOR RE-ELECTION, WERE ALL HANDSOMELY RETURNED,
WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE TWO WHO RAN IN TOBAGO. THE
PNM DREW WELL AND THE PARTY MACHINERY PERFORMED WELL,
IN SPITE OF THE STRONG PUBLIC CRITICISM WHICH THE PRIME
MINISTER LEVELLED PRIOR TO THE ELECTION AGAINST BOTH
THE PARTY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT.
EVEN THE SIX CABINET MEMBERS WHOM THE PRIME MINISTER
REFUSED TO SUPPORT PERSONALLY OR TO CAMPAIGN FOR,
WON HANDILY. THE ELECTION WAS AN AFFIRMATION OF THE
CONTINUING VALIDITY OF THE "OLD POLITICS" OF JOBS,
PARTONAGE, AND AN EFFECTIVE PARTY MACHINE AND SHOWED
THAT POLITICAL HABITS AND LOYALTIES ARE DEEPLY INGRAINED
IN TRINIDAD.

3. WHILE A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE
PERFORMANCE OF THE PNM GOVERNMENT OVER THE YEARS UN-
QUESTIONABLY EXISTS, THE PNM'S SHOWING AT THE POLLS
WAS STRONG AND SOLID. EVEN THOUGH THE TURNOUT OF
VOTERS WAS LIGHT - 55 PERCENT OF THE 566,000 REGISTERED
VOTERS - ESPECIALLY IN THE AREAS OF THE RULING PARTY'S
GREATEST STRENGTH WHERE THE OPPOSITION DID NOT PRESENT
A REAL VOTE-PULLING CHALLENGE TO THE PNM, THE PARTY WON
54 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE. IN ITS TRADITIONAL STRONGHOLDS
IN NORTHERN TRINIDAD AND THE URBAN AND INDUSTRIALISED
AREAS ALONG THE WEST COAST, THE PNM COMPLETELY DOMINATED
ALL THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. IN MOST OF THESE CON-
STITUENCIES, THE PNM CANDIDATE RECEIVED BETWEEN 60 AND
80 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE, WITH THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF
TAKING 86 PERCENT OF THE VOTE AGAINST WEAK OPPOSITION IN HIS
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PORT OF SPAIN SOUTH SEAT. THE PNM ALSO DID WELL ACROSS
THE COUNTRY, PLACING A STRONG SECOND IN THE TWELVE RACES
ID DID NOT WIN OUTRIGHT.

4. THE UNITED LABOUR FRONT (ULF), WHICH EMERGED AS THE
LEADIING OPPOSITION PARTY, CONTESTED ONLY 26 SEATS,
BUT RECEIVED 27 PERDENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE AND WON 10 SEATS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. THE ULF WAS SUCCESSFUL

IN 10 OF THE 12 SEATS IN THE PREDOMINANTLY EAST INDIAN AREAS OF CENTRAL AND SOUTH TRINIDAD, WHICH HAD TRADITIONALLY GONE TO THE DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY (DLP), AND RAN STRONGLY IN THE OTHER TWO. OUTSIDE THESE AREAS, THE ULF PERFORMED CREDITABLY, COMING IN SECOND OR A RESPECTABLE THIRD IN 8 OF THE SEATS.

5. BASDEO PANDAY, THE CHARISMATIC PRESIDENT OF THE ALL TRINIDAD SUGAR WORKERS UNION, WHO IS THE POLITICAL STAR OF THE COLLEGIAL ULF LEADERSHIP, CAME OUT OF THE ELECTION AS THE STRONGEST OPPOSITION POLITICIAN AND WILL BE THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT. DESPITE HIS STRONG PERSONAL FOLLOWING AND THE FACT THAT HE WAS ABLE TO DELIVER THE VOTES IN THE SUGAR BELT, HOWEVER, PANDAY DOES NOT NOW APPEAR TO HAVE A COMMENSURATE AMOUNT OF POWER WITHIN THE RULING COUNCILS OF HIS PARTY. HIS PERSONAL CONTROL OF THE ULF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, NOW THAT THEY ARE ELECTED, IS UNCERTAIN AT BEST, AND AMONG THE PARTY'S SENATORS IT IS VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTANT. THE LOOSE AMALGAM OF OIL AND SUGAR TRADE UNIONS, LEFTIST LABOR LEADERS, RADICAL CAMP FOLLOWES AND RACIAL ACTIVISTS, WHICH CONSTITUTES THE ULF AND CONTROLS THE PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION, HAS AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO IMPOSE MORE DOCTRINAIRE POSITIONS ON PANDAY THAN HE OR THE MEMBERS OF HIS UNION WOULD LIKELY TAKE ON THEIR OWN. TWO INDICATIONS OF THE RADICALS' ASCENDANCY WITHIN THE ULF ARE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE PARTY'S MANIFESTO WAS HEAVILY LACED WITH MARXIST RHETORIC AND PROGRAMS, AND THE FACT THAT ONLY 3 OUT OF THE 26 ULF CANDIDATES CAME FROM THE SUGAR WORKER OR CANE FARMER UNIONS. AS THE OPPOSITION, THE ULF WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO PRESS ITS "ANTI-CAPITALIST, WORKING CLASS" IDEOLOGICAL VIEWS AND RESIST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRAGMATIC COOPERATION WITH THE GOVERNING PARTY. IT WILL HAVE AND WILL USE A READY AND RESPECTABLE PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT'S PRAGMATIC ECONOMIC PROGRAM AND ITS COOPERATION WITH MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS.

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ACTION ARA-10

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EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 FEAE-00 /069 W

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R 231200Z SEP 76

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6. A SURPRISING DEVELOPMENT IN THE ELECTION WAS THE TOTALITY OF THE COLLAPSE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY (DLP) AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ULF SUCCEEDED TO THE TRADITIONAL OPPOSITION CONSTITUENCY. THE DLP WON ONLY 3 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE, AND NO SINGLE DLP CANDIDATE RECEIVED AS MUCH AS 10 PERCENT OF THE VOTES IN HIS CONSTITUENCY. THE PARTY'S POLITICAL LEADER, WITH THE FORMERLY "MAGIC" NAME OF CAPILDEO, RECEIVED ONLY 290 OF THE 9,200 VOTES CAST IN HIS CONTEST WITH ULF LEADER PANDAY.

7. THE TWO RELATIVELY NEW PARTIES WHICH HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO DRAW CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT, TAPIA AND THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION CONGRESS (DAC), FAILED BADLY. TAPIA WON ONLY 40 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE AND NO SEATS, NOT EVEN IN TUNAPUNA, THE PARTY'S HOME BASE WHERE ITS RESPECTED LEADER, LLOYD BEST, WAS A CANDIDATE. DAC WON ONLY 80 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE WHILE CAPTURING THE TWO SEATS IN TOBAGO, AND LOST ITS CLAIM TO REPRESENT A BROADLY-BASED ALTERNATIVE TO THE PNM.

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8. THE VICTORY OF THE DAC IN TOBAGO WAS A REAL, IF SMALL, BLOW TO THE PNM, ALTHOUGH THE PRIME MINISTER HAS SUBSEQUENTLY ATTEMPTED TO MAKE LIGHT OF THE LOSS. DAC'S SUCCESS WAS DUE TO 1) THE TIME, EFFORT AND MONEY WHICH

THE TOBAGO-BORN LEADER OF THE PARTY, A.N.R. ROBINSON, DEDICATED TO WINNING HIS OWN SEAT, 2) THE SUCCESS DAC HAD IN CONVINCING THE TOGAGONIANS THAT IT HAD A CHANCE OF FORMING THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, AND 3) THE COMPLACENCY OF THE PNM IN THE FACE OF REAL DISSATISFACTION IN TOBAGO AT THE PERCEIVED SECOND-CLASS TREATMENT OF THE ISLAND BY THE GOVERNMENT. ROBINSON WILL NOT HAVE A VERY EASY ROW TO HOE IN PARLIAMENT, SINCE HE IS REGARDED AS A DEFECTOR BY THE PNM AND IS BLAMED BY THE ULF FOR THE FAILURE TO FORM A LONG-DISCUSSED COALITION BETWEEN THE DAC AND THE ULF WHICH IT BELIEVES WOULD HAVE SUCCEEDED IN DEFEATING THE PNM.

9. THE OTHER PARTIES RECEIVED ONLY GEGGLIGIBLE SUPPORT AND WERE NOT A FACTOR IN THE ELECTION. IT HAD BEEN FEARED THAT THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE PARTIES WOULD SPLIT THE OPPOSITION VOTE AND ALLOW THE PNM TO WALK AWAY WITH SEVERAL SEATS WITH LESS THAN A MAJORITY OF THE TOTAL VOTE. VOTE SPLITTING MAY HAVE AFFECTED THE OUTCOME IN THE TUNAPUNA AND NARIVA CONSTITUENCIES WHICH THE PNM WON WITH 43 PERCENT AND 40 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY. THE EVIDENCE IS NOT CONCLUSIVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE OPPOSITION VOTE WOULD HAVE COALESCED BEHIND ONE OPPOSITION CANDIDATE. IN ANY EVENT, THE OUTCOME OF THESE CONTESTS WAS NOT CRITICAL TO THE BALANCE OF POWER IN PARLIAMENT.

10. RACE REMAINED AN IMPORTANT FACTOR, IF NOT THE DETERMINANT, IN TRINIDAD POLITICS. MOST EAST INDIANS CLEARLY SUPPORTED THE ULF AND MOST BLACKS SUPPORTED THE PNM. DESPITE THE ULF'S ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY ITSELF AS A MULTI-RACIAL PARTY OF THE "WORKING CLASS", ITS SUPPORT CAME ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FROM THE RURAL EAST INDIAN POPULATION. EVEN THE PREDOMINANTLY BLACK OILFIELD WORKERS, WHOSE UNION PRESIDENT IS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE ULF, REMAINED LOYAL TO THE PNM IN THE VOTING BOOTH. IN THE URBAN NORTH, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHERE A GOOD MANY OF THE BLACK URBAN PROLETARIAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VOTE FOR A "WORKING CLASS" PARTY, THE PREDOMINANTLY BLACK BUT NON-IDEOLOGICAL PNM RACKED UP ITS USUAL IMPRESSIVE VOTE.

11. THERE HAVE BEEN CONTENTIONS THAT AN APPARENT SURGE OF SUPPORT TOWARDS THE ULF WITH ITS DE FACTO INDIAN LEADER AND THE INDIAN BASE OF STRENGTH IN THE FINAL DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN CAUSED BLACK VOTERS IN THE NORTH TO FALL IN SOLIDLY BEHIND THE PNM TO PREVENT THE "PRESIDENT OF THE SUGAR WORKERS UNION" FROM BECOMING PRIME MINISTER, AS ONE PNM SPEAKER PUT THE ISSUE IN THE CODE WORDS OF THE COUNTRY'S RACIAL RIVALRY. THE INCIDENT WHICH IS

REPORTED TO HAVE CRYSTALLIZED RACIAL SENTIMENT IN THE NORTH WAS A ULF MOTORCADE THROUGH THE NORTHERN URBAN AREAS FROM ARIMA TO PORT OF SPAIN TWO DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTION. THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MOTORCADE WERE CHIEFLY THE EAST INDIAN SUPPORTERS OF THE ULF WHO REPORTEDLY ENCOUNTERED AND RETURNED A GOOD DEAL OF HOSTILITY FROM THE MAINLY BLACK INHABITANTS OF THESE AREAS AND, ACCORDING TO SOME POLITICIANS, CAUSED A SWING OF BLACK SUPPORT AWAY FROM PARTIES SUCH AS TAPIA AND DAC BACK TO THE SAFETY OF THE PNM. THERE IS UNDOUBTEDLY SOME MERIT TO THIS ARGUMENT.

12. IT IS, HOWEVER, ARGUABLE THAT THE VOTERS OF TRINIDAD VOTED FOR THEIR OWN ECONOMIC INTEREST AND THAT THESE INTERESTS ALSO HAPPENED TO COINCIDE WITH THE RACIAL DIVISIONS OF THE SOCIETY. THE SUGAR WORKERS AND CANE FARMERS ARE CHIEFLY EAST INDIAN AND HAVE LONG BEEN IGNORED BY THE PNM GOVERNMENT. PANDAY AND RAFFIQUE SHAH, PRESIDENT OF THE CANE FARMERS' UNION, AS WELL AS THE OTHER MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE ULF, HAVE ON THE OTHER HAND IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES STRONGLY WITH THE INTERESTS OF THESE DISADVANTAGED GROUPS. UNDER ULF LEADERS, THE SUGAR WORKERS AND CANE FARMERS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN WINNING SOME REAL BENEFITS IN TERMS OF HIGHER WAGES AND TOUGHER BARGAINING POSITIONS ON THE PRICE OF CANE. IT WAS NOT UNREASONABLE, THEREFORE, TO EXPECT THESE GROUPS, WHICH HAVE A COMMON AND SPECIFIC ECONOMIC INTEREST AS WELL AS A COMMON ETHNIC BASE, TO VOTE FOR A POLITICAL PARTY WHICH THEY PERCEIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO BE WORKING IN THEIR INTEREST. THE BETTER-EDUCATED AND BETTER-PAID OILFIELD WORKERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVING BENEFITTED HANDSOMELY FROM THE OIL BONANZA AND FROM THE EXISTING ECONOMIC SYSTEM IN TRINIDAD, HAVE GOOD ECONOMIC REASONS TO OBJECT TO AND TO VOTE AGAINST ANY RADICAL CHANGE IN THE STATUS QUO. SIMILARLY, THE URBAN BLACK POPULATION OF NORTHERN TRINIDAD, WHICH CONTAINS LARGE NUMBERS OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND HAS BENEFITTED GREATLY FROM GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE IN THE PAST, AS STRONG ECONOMIC REASONS FOR CLOSING RANKS BEHIND THE PNM TO PREVENT A VICTORY BY A PARTY PLEDGED TO RADICAL CHANGE. FAY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, POLITICAL STABILITY, REPORTS, NATIONAL ELECTIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PORTO02469
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760359-0803
From: PORT OF SPAIN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760928/aaaaaxni.tel
Line Count: 325
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 PORT OF SPAIN 2409
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUL 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <08 JUL 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE 1976 GENERAL ELECTION
TAGS: PINT, TD, (WILLIAMS, ERIC)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006